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A Sant-Sipāhī by Himself: The Spiritual and Military Autobiography of Gurū Gobind

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In the north of the Punjab, the Shivaliks, the first foothills of the Himalayas, form an arch some 1600 km in length and 10 to 50 km in breadth, stretching roughly from the Indus to the Brahmaputra, with hilltops between 900 and 1200 meters in height. Long ago, rival Rājpūt kingdoms flourished in these hills, as was evident in Rajasthan and Bundelkhand. With the Turko-Afghan dynastic conquests, most of these local states became vassals of the Delhi Sultanate and later of the Mughal empire.

Under the Mughals, Rājpūt princes exercised a form of autonomy, ruling their province and commanding their army in the name of the emperor.[i] In the cultural sphere too, the Rājpūts affirmed their identity. Just as the Mughal emperors and their nobility patronised Persian literature and the paintings associated with it, the Rājpūt patronised poets and painters. The poets of their courts dealt mostly with mythological themes in Sanskrit or, even more, in *Braj-bhasa*. Usually referred to as Braj, the Hindi dialect of the cultural region of Braj, around the towns of Mathura and Vrindaban associated with the devotion to Kr̥ṣṇa, arose in the early sixteenth century as one of the major literary idioms of northern India.[ii] As for the painters of the Rājpūt courts, they were expected to represent, in manuscripts or on fort walls, episodes from the great texts of devotion to Devī, Rāma or Kr̥ṣṇa.[iii] That is how the so called Pahāṛī painting school developed in the Rājpūt kingdoms of the Shivaliks, in places like Kangra, Basohli or Guler.

For the Rājpūts, a particular way of affirming their cultural identity in the context of Mughal domination was, in line with the old tradition of royal biographies and chronicles of ruling families *(vaṃśavalī)*, to commission poets and write their genealogy, glorifying their divine origin, their heroic deeds, and the history of their lineage and of their kingdom.[iv] This self-assertiveness through literary patronage reaches a peak in the seventeenth century. At that time, the Rājpūts, though still warlords, and particularly so in the northern regions, made much of their aristocratic ethos in which art patronage played a key role in the quest for prestige.[v]

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The present article is concerned with a particular specimen of royal poetry written in the Shivaliks: a seemingly autobiographical poem attributed to the tenth and last Gurū of the Sikhs, Gobind, born in 1666 ; he was the Gurū from 1675 to his death in 1708.[vi] The text I am going to examine is found in the second sacred book of the Sikhs, the *Dasam Granth*, and is entitled *Bacitra Nāṭaka* (The Wonderful Drama). Though it has recently been used by scholars engaged in new approaches of Sikh history, it has not been studied, so to speak, for itself, except by Robin Rinehart in her recent, illuminating survey of the *Dasam Granth*.[vii] After having presented the composition of the poem, I shall focus on the way in which the latter produces the portrait of a *sipāhī*, a king fighting for *dharma*, and how it proposes an origin myth of the Sikh Gurūs' lineage. I shall finally touch upon the way in which, in the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*, Gobind appears also as a Sant advocating a renewed Sikh conception of God, virtue and sin, based on the *guramati* inherited from Nānak but showing awareness of the identity-assertions of the Rajputs from the Shivaliks.

1. The *Bacitra Nāṭaka* as a text

General points

The *Dasam Granth*, which is recognised as the second canonical scripture by the Sikhs (the primary one being the *Ādi Granth*), was compiled in the early 1730s.[viii] Whereas the language of the *Ādi Granth*, compiled in 1604, is the Sant-Bhasa, based on old Khaṛī Bolī, the Hindi of the Delhi region with words drawn from various languages such as old Panjabi, old Rajasthani and Persian, the *Dasam Granth* is mostly written in Braj. Its basic content consists of three types of texts. The first ones are poems which according to a section of Sikh scholars can be safely attributed to Gurū Gobind (though some specialists think they are the works of poets who followed him). The remaining bulk of the work is regarded as coming from Gurū Gobind's entourage: lengthy verse retellings of the Rāma and Kṛṣṇa legends on the one hand, and, on the other hand, all sorts of anecdotes gathered in the longest section of the book, the *Atha Pakhyāna Caritra*[ix], most of which deal – in a way difficult to accept for many Sikhs today – with the manners of women. Because of its content, the *Dasam Granth* was submitted to sharp scrutiny by the Tat Khālsā reformers of the Siṅgh Sabhā movement in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and an authorised version of 1428 pages in the modern standard print was published in 1902. But the debate has continued. Certain scholarly versions exclude the *Atha Pakhyāna Caritra*; for instance, the *Śabadāratha Dasama Grantha Sāhiba* edited by Bhāī Raṇdhīr Siṅgh.[x] The *Bacitra Nāṭaka* is one of the texts which, according to

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most Sikh scholars, can safely be attributed to Gurū Gobind.[xi]And whether it was actually written or commissioned by him, or written in his entourage, does not make much difference here:[xii] it quickly gained famed among the Sikhs as being an autobiographical writing of the Gurū.

When he composed the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* or authorised its writing by one of the poets of his court, Gurū Gobind – then a young man just over thirty years old – ruled over Anandpur, on the edge of the Shivaliks.[xiii] He was the heir to a lineage of spiritual masters going back to Nānak (1469-1639), an exceptional character combining to the highest degree the qualities of a mystic, of an outstanding poet and of a great theologian, and associated with the so-called *nir-guṇī bhakti* whose main exponents are the Sants, wandering loving devotees of a God without attributes, without "qualities" *(guṇa)* such as form, legend, skin colour, etc.[xiv] After Nānak and around his successors at the head of the *panth* or 'path' he had initiated, Sikhism gradually developed as an autonomous religion with its own sacred book, the *Ādi Granth*, its pilgrimage places and its liturgical calendar. During the Seventeenth century, it was joined massively by Jāts, members of a caste of agriculturists dominating most villages of the Punjab, having retained martial traditions from their past as nomadic pastoralists, and engaged in regular conflict with the Mughal authorities over the payment of land-revenue taxes.[xv]

By transferring the seat of the spiritual and temporal power of Sikhs in the Shivaliks, Gurū Gobind's father, Gurū Tegh Bahādur, exposed his disciples to the worship of the Mother Goddess and *tantrik* forms of Buddhism; this is revealed in the *Bacitra Nātaka* as well as in the whole of *Dasam Granth*.

Form and content

Composed in literary Braj, the *Bacitra Nātaka* is divided into fourteen parts *(bhāga)* of uneven length and has a total of 1818 verses written in fourteen types of meter or stanzas.[xvi] The whole text bespeaks the great familiarity of its author with both heroic and devotional poetry, and it can only be the work of an accomplished poet. This does not exclude the possibility that it might have been written by Gurū Gobind, who is presented by the Sikh tradition as having received a comprehensive education, notably in the domain of languages and poetry; in this sense, he carried on the tradition of six of his predecessors at the head of the Panth, including his own father, whose compositions he is said to have introduced into the *Ādi Granth*. The question here, once more, is not to speculate on the actual author of the text,

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but to try making out how the poem was meant to propagate among his disciples an image of the Gurū and of the way he affirmed his authority.

The fourteen parts of the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* are organised in three clearly distinct sections. The first one, slightly over one-seventh of the text, is a long eulogy to God, who is glorified, notably, through a long list of grandiose qualifications and negative adjectives of the "endless" or "faultless" type, which often assumes an artificially sanskritised form through a masculine accusative ending; this was obviously destined at enhancing the status and prestige of the text by pretending to speak in something close to the solemn language of the orthodox Brahmins.[xvii] Here is an example of this attempt at Sanskritisation of a Sikh scripture:

> *ajeyaṃ abheyaṃ anāmaṃ aṭhāmaṃ*
> *mahā joga jogaṃ mahā kāma kāmaṃ*[xviii]
> Invincible, fearless, nameless, placeless,
> He is the great Yogi among the yogis, the great Lover among the lovers.

The second section – slightly over two-sevenths of the text – narrates Gurū Gobind's genealogy since the creation of the world and the times of the first kings. Lastly, the third section relates the success of the Gurū in three wars for dharma; they were fought respectively in 1688, 1691 and 1696. It is to be noted here that since the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* does not even allude to the creation of the Khālsā in 1699, it was most likely written between 1696 and 1699, – and hence in Anandpur where Gurū Gobind resided after his stay in Pāoṇṭā from 1685 to 1688.[xix]

2. Gobind the *sipāhī*: a fighting king with a complex genealogy

Gobind's mission

A pious devotee of God and a just king fighting for the preservation of dharma in the Kaliyuga (the last and most degenerate of the four world ages), a Sant and a Sipāhī: this is the portrait of Gurū Gobind painted respectively in the first and third sections of the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*. We shall first concentrate on the fighting king, who talks about his mission in words akin to the conceptions expressed in the *Dharmaśastra*, according to which the king is to be regarded as divinely ordained and is in charge of maintaining the dharma and protecting the kingdom:

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hama iha kāja jagata mo āe
dharama heta guradeva paṭhāe
jahāṃ tahāṃ tuma dharama bithāro
dusaṭa dokhīani pakari pachāro
yāhī kāja dharā hampa janamaṃ
samajha lehu sādhū sabha mana maṃ
dharama calāvana santa ubārana
dusaṭa sabhana ko mūla upārana[xx]
The reason why I came to this world
Is that God the Guru sent me for the sake of the dharma.
'Where ever you propagate the dharma,
Crush the villains and the sinners.'
This is the reason why I was born,
Sādhūs, understand this in your heart:
In order to cause the dharma to rule, to save the Sants,
To definitively eradicate all the villains.

In the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* this eradication takes the form of three wars. The first one is the battle of Bhaṅgāṇī (1688), in which Gurū Gobind, still residing in Pāoṇṭā, is attacked by the Mughal Governor of Kashmīr Fateh Ṣāh.[xxi] In the second one, the battle of Nadauṇ (1691), Gurū Gobind, now established in Anandpur, comes forward to help Bhīm Cand, the Rājpūt *rājā* of Kalhūr attacked by Alif Khān, envoy of the Mughal officer Mīāṃ Khān who had come in the Jammū area to levy taxes. Alif Khān is finally put to flight.[xxii]In the third war, fought in 1696, Dilāvar Khān, the governor of Lahore whose troops led by his son have suffered a serious setback in an expedition against Gurū Gobind,[xxiii] sends his commander Ḥusain Khān, called Ḥusainī in the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*, to avenge the defeat. On his way, Ḥusainī attacks the *rājā* of Guler, Rājā Rāj Siṅgh, called Gopāl in the poem, who manages to escape. Ḥusainī chases him and, in the battle which engages, he is supported by Kirpāl, the Rājpūt *rājā* of Kaṭoc. But as Gurū Gobind's Sikhs come to fight with Rājā Gopāl, Ḥusainī is defeated and slain, and so too his generals Himmat and Kimmat, and the *rājā* of Kaṭoc.[xxiv] Infuriated by these events, Dilāvar Khān despatches a cavalry party and troops under the commandment of a valiant Rājpūt officer, Jujhār Siṅgh, himself assisted by Candan Rāi. Jujhār Siṅgh manages to seise the town of Bhalān, but he is attacked by Gaj Siṅgh, *rājā* of Jasvār. Finally, though Jujhār is

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helped by the *rājā* of Candel, he is surrounded and killed while rushing headlong into the army of his enemies.[xxv]

All along, the Gurū presents himself as constantly protected and assisted by God in his *dharma-yuddha*s (wars for the dharma). In the battle of Bhaṇgāṇī, for instance, Hari Cand shoots three arrows towards him without causing him a wound.[xxvi] In the battle of Nadauṇ, where the Gurū shows himself using first a rifle and then a bow, it is God who puts an end to the war and gets the enemies driven out into the river.[xxvii] And when Dilāvar Khān sends his son with numerous 'Khans' against him, Gurū Gobind, having won without being hurt, says:

prabha bala hamai na chui sakai bhājata bhae nidāna[xxviii]
Thanks to the power of God, they could not touch me; they ran away ultimately.

Lastly, regarding the wars the Gurū relates, a striking feature ought to be noted: all three are defensive, and this is in tune with a famous Persian couplet from the *Zafara-nāmā*, the above mentioned defiant letter addressed to Aurangzeb, whose authorship however remains a point of debate[xxix]:

co kâr az hame ḥile dar gożaśt
ḥalâl ast bordan be śamśir dasṯ[xxx]
When all means have failed,
It is permissible by religion (Ar. *ḥalāl*) to take to the sword.

A complex genealogy

The defensive nature of these wars allows us to figure out which image of himself as a king, and as a *sipāhī*, Gurū Gobind wanted to project. These wars are the manifestation of the mission for which God has sent him on earth. As He told him:

maiṃ apnā suta tohi nivājā
pantha pracaru karabe kaha sājā
jāhi tahāṃ tai dharamu calāi
kabudhi karana te loka haṭāi[xxxi]
I have cherished you as My son,
I have prepared you for the propagation of the Panth.

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Hence go, and spread the dharma;
Divert people from evil actions.

It is in order to provide explanations of his beginnings that Gurū Gobind recounts his genealogy since the origin of the world, much in the style of the *vaṃśavalī*s.[xxxii] What is, in this respect, his argument? It is rather simple. Since God has created the world, he wanted dharma to prevail. To this end, he despatched the Gods, the Siddhs and the Sādhūs, the Ṛṣis, Dutt (*i. e*. Aditya, the Sun), Gorakh Nāth, the great ninth to thirteenth century yogi, held to be an incarnation of Śiva, Rāmānanda, a late medieval Vaiṣṇava teacher and devotee of Rāma and Sītā, the Mahāpuruṣas,[xxxiii] and Mahādīn (Muḥammad). But each of them only thought of himself and of his own power. As for Gobind, he was in deep meditation, sitting on the mount Hema Kuṇṭa (Golden Peak, name of mythic chain of mountains, north of the Himalayas), also called Sapta Sriṇga (Seven Horns), where the Pāṇḍavas (major protagonists of the *Mahābhārata*) practised yoga. When God instructed him to go and spread dharma, he finally accepted:

ṭhāḍha bhayo maiṃ jori kari bacana kahā sira nyāi
pantha calai taba jagata mai jaba tuma karahu sahāi[xxxiv]
I stood up and, with folded hands, I said, bowing down my head:
'The Panth will flourish in the world when You grant Your help'.

He went preaching the salvaging values of meditation on the Name, the uselessness of the Koran and of the Hindu scriptures exemplified by the Purāṇas, and affirming to be only a man, but entrusted with a divinely enjoined mission:

iha kārani prabha mohi paṭhāyo
taba mai jagata janamu dhari āyo
jima tina kahī inai tima kahihau
aüra kisū te baira na gahihau
jo hama ko parameśara ucari hai
te sabha naraki kuṇḍa mahi pari hai
mo ko dāsu tavan kā jāno
yā maiṃ bhedu na rañca pachāno
maiṃ ho parama purakha ko dāsā

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dekhani āyo jagata tamāsā
jo prabha jagati kahā so kahi ho
mrita loka te moni na rahiho[xxxv]
This the reason why the Lord sent me,
And then I was born in the world.
Whatever the Lord said is what I say,
And I do not have enmity with anyone.
Whoever calls me the Supreme Lord
Will fall into hell.
Know me as the servant of the One,
From Whom, recognise it, I am not in the least separated.
I am the servant of the Supreme Being;
I have come to see the spectacle of the world.
I say whatever the Lord of the world said;
In this world of death, I shall not remain a silent ascetic.

Gobind also locates himself in the lineage of the Sikh Gurūs, and by doing so, he endows it with an origin myth, which has proved long-lasting and which is linked to the story of Lava and Kuśa, the sons of Rāma – himself a king of the so called Solar Dynasty going back to Sūrya – and of Sītā.[xxxvi] Kuśa founds Kasūra, and Lava Lahuravā, today respectively Qasur and Lahore in West Punjab, Pakistan. But a descendant of Kuśa, Kālaketu, expels Kālarāi, a descendant of Lava, from Lahurāva. Kālarāi then settles in Sanaudha and marries the daughter of the local king. They have a son by the name of Soḍhī Rāi, whose descendants are called the Soḍhīs and are great kings. But their quarrels persist with the descendants of Lava, who finally defeat Kuśa's descendants. Those who survive among the latter go to Kaśī to study the Vedas: that is why they are called the Bedīs: let us recall here that Gurū Nānak and his first two successors at the head of the Panth were born in the Bedī sub-caste of the Khatrīs, and that all the Sikh Gurūs from Gurū Rām Dās onwards belonged to the Soḍhī sub-caste of the Khatrīs.[xxxvii]

To come back to the origin of the Gurūs, it so happens that the Soḍhī king of Maddra Desa (*maddra-deśa*, as the Punjab is still called in the text) sends letters to the Bedīs, asking them to forget their ancient enmity. The Bedīs then go to Maddra Desa and submit to the king, who causes them to recite the Vedas. The king is so highly pleased that he gives his kingdom to

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the reciter, the Bedī Amrit Rāi, and he and the other Soḍhīs 'go to the forest' *(bani gae)*.[xxxviii] However, before the latter leave, the new king makes the following prediction:

> *jaba nānaka kali mai hama āna kahāi hai*
> *ho jagata pūja kari tohi paramapada pāi hai*[xxxix]
> When I shall come in the Iron Age and be called Nānak,
> You will be revered in the world and reach the Supreme Stage.

Then, the Soḍhīs depart for the forest and the Bedīs rule over Maddra Desa. But quarrels appear, the world is in a very bad state, and the Bedīs lose their kingship. Only twenty villages are left with them and they become agriculturists. This is when Nānak is born among them. He gathers disciples, propagates dharma and puts the seekers on the path to Truth and salvation. Then, says Gurū Gobind, Nānak transforms himself into Aṅgad, a Trehaṇ by sub-caste, then into Amar Dās, a Bhallā by sub-caste, and then into Rām Dās, a Soḍhī: the prediction is thus realised, and the following incarnations of Nānak are all Soḍhīs, from father to son, until Gobind.[xl]

One cannot help being struck, while reading this origin myth, by its Hindu character. This stems not only from a genealogy which makes the Sikh Gurūs direct descendants of Rāma and Sītā, and hence Rājpūts of the Solar Dynasty, but also from the emphasis placed on caste, a social division which the first five Gurūs, in their *Ādi Granth* poems, treated as an aberration due to *mayā*. In the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*, as we have seen, the Khatrīs become Kṣatriyas, and the emphasis is on the Bedī and Soḍhī sub-castes to which the Gurūs belong.

The story of Gobind as a Rājpūt descendant of Rāma, the story of Gobind as an envoy of God and the story of Gobind as a reincarnation of Nānak are woven into a complex origin myth. Gobind is a Sipāhī through his distant kingly inheritance and a Sant as Nānak's reincarnation, sent in this world by God to re-establish dharma. But which view of God does the Sant Gurū Gobind claims to have in the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*? A close scrutiny will show that some distance with Gurū Nānak had emerged.

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3. Gobind the Sant: a renewed Sikh conception of God, virtue and sin

At the heart of Gurū Nānak's teachings is the faith in One God, revealed by his creation: the True Gurū *(sati-guru)*. God is omnipotent *(samārathu)*, infinite *(aparu)*, eternal *(akālu)*, without form or attributes *(niraṅkāru, niraguṇu)*, unknowable and ineffable *(agāhu, akathu)*, omnipresent *(bharapūri)*. Both within and without the human being, He can manifest His grace *(karamu, nadari)* and lead men to the supreme Truth *(saccu)*. Without this grace, the human being remains entangled in the snare of worldly pursuits or seeks salvation under the guidance of false masters, engaging in practices such as yoga or asceticism, which, bind him to the wheel of transmigration. But if God grants him His grace, the human being can get rid of his illusion *(māyā)* regarding the ultimate goal of life and reach the shores of deliverance *(mukati)* by listening to the voice of God in his heart. This voice, called the *guru* by Nānak, whispers the word *(sabadu)* containing the divine order *(hukamu)* which is both the principle of universal harmony and the indication of a possible salvation. To hear this order, the human being must purify his own spiritual essence *(manu)*, because his ego *(haumaiṃ)* is but a slave of material life. Hence, Nānak proposes a discipline *(sañjamu)*, which has value only if one lives in a perfect love for God and is always ready for the service *(sevā)* of the true believers. This discipline consists basically in remembering *(simaraṇa)* and repeating *(japu)* the divine Name. The human being is thus in a position to obey the divine order and to gradually rise through five mystical realms *(khaṇḍu)*. The last one is that of Truth, and once the human being reaches there, his regenerated essence merges into God in a supreme beatitude *(sahaju)*.[xli]

The God Gurū Gobind sings in the first part of the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* is still, in many ways, the One of Nānak, creator and saviour of those who lovingly meditate on His name. As stated by the Gurū in two couplets (*dohrā*s) of the second part of the poem, when he presents his mission:

jo nija prabha mo so kahā so kahihau jaga māhi
jo tiha prabha kau dhyāi haiṃ anta suraga jo jāhi
hari hari jana dui eka haiṃ biba bicāra kachu nāhi
jala te upaja taraṅga jiu jala hī bikhai samāhi[xlii]
What the Lord told me is what I say in the world:
Those who meditate on the Lord ultimately go to heaven.

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Hari and Hari's devotees are one, there is no difference between them,
As the wave arises from the water and then merges in the water.

But the picture is more complex than the one we get from the *Ādi Granth*. For instance, whereas Gurū Nānak calls God Satiguru, Hari, Rāma, and sometimes Rabb or even Allāh, Gurū Gobind calls Him systematically Kāla, which means both Time and Death. This supreme God is the creator of the other Gods and He can destroy them:

kite kriśana se kiṭa koṭai banāe
kite rāma se mīṭe ḍāre upāe
mahāṃdīna kete pruthī māṃjha hūe
samai āpanī āpanī anti mūe
jite aülīā ambīā hoi bīte
tityo kāla jītā na te kāla jīte
jite rāma se kriśana hui biśana āe
tityo kāla khāpio na te kāla ghāe
jite indra se candra se hota āe
tityo kāla khāpā na te kāla ghāe[xliii]
Somewhere he created millions like Kr̥ṣṇa,
Somewhere he erased and created many like Rāma.
How many Muhammads came into being on the earth,
Who died when their time came!
All the saints and prophets who existed came to pass.
Kāla defeated them, they could not defeat Kāla.
All the likes of Rāma and Kr̥ṣṇa and all the Viṣṇus who came to exist,
Kāla wiped them all out and they could not destroy Him.
All the likes of Indra and Candra who came into being,
Kāla wiped them out and they could not destroy Him.

He can indeed assume any shape:

aneka rūpa sohiyaṃ
bisekha deva mohiyaṃ[xliv]
You assume innumerable forms,

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You allure the great gods.

He can even appear with the attributes of one of the gods He has created:

ghaṭā jāṇu syāmaṃ
dutaṃ abhirāmaṃ
catura bāha cāraṃ
karīṭaṃ su dhāraṃ
gadā saṅkha cakkraṃ
dipai krūra bakkraṃ [xlv]
Know that this is the Dark Lord in the form of a cloud,
Radiant, enchanting.
He has four arms,
He wears a crown.
Mace, conch and disk
Glisten, steeply threatening.

This is a major innovation 'in the idea of the divine'[xlvi] which makes it possible to adore him, as is the case elsewhere in the *Dasam Granth*, by singing the noble deeds of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa, or by praising Devī. In the *Bacitra Nātaka* itself are found praises describing forms of God or their attributes in a manner quite alien to Gurū Nānak's strictly *nirguṇī bhakti*. Sometimes, it appears as though Kṛṣṇa is being adored:

mahā sundara siāmaṃ mahāṃ abhirāmaṃ
mahāṃ rūpa rūpaṃ mahāṃ kāma kāmaṃ[xlvii]
You are the Dark Lord, the very ravishing the very enchanting;
you are the most beautiful of the beautiful ones, the great Lover among lovers.

But the most striking references linked to the religious culture of the Shivaliks concerns the Devī and the sword which symbolises her. In the following passage, God takes her form and her attributes:

kripāṇa pāṇa rājaī
biloka pāpa bhajaī

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alaṅkritaṃ su dehayaṃ
tano mano ki mohayaṃ
kamāṇa bāṇa dhārahī
aneka sattru ṭārahī
ghammaki ghuṅgharaṃ suraṃ
navaṃ ninmāda nūparaṃ[xlviii]
The sword is impressive in her hand:
When sin sees it, it runs away.
Her body is covered with ornaments
Which charm the body and the mind.
The arrow is ready upon the string;
It puts innumerable enemies to flight.
Her sleigh bells ring;
Her anklets with jingles cause a new sound to be heard.

It is to be noted here that Gurū Gobind is usually held as the author of two long *Dasam Granth* poems focusing on the Devī and largely based on the Sanskrit *Devī-māhātmya* (Greatness of Devī). The first one is the *Caṇḍī Caritra* (The Story of Caṇḍī)[xlix], immediately following the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*, – whose last stanza announces the composition:

pahile caṇḍī caritra banāyo
nakha sikha te krama bhākha sunāyo
chora kathā taba prathama sunāī
aba cāhata phira karau baḍāī[l]
The story of Caṇḍī has been composed before;[li]
From toe-nail to top-knot, I have written her deeds.
I have first written her whole story;
Now I want to continue with her praise.

The second one is the *Vār Bhagaütī Jī kī*, to whose composition alludes the first three verses of the stanza just quoted.[lii]

In the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*, there is even a succession of twenty-two verses in which Gobind praises his God as carrying the arms which are honoured in another text of the *Dasam Granth*,

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the *Śastra Nāma Mālā* (The Garland of the Names of Arms): sword, dagger, arrow, rifle, mace, spear, disc, gun, etc.[liii] These arms do not remain inert and Gobind often represents his God as a destroyer: not only does He annihilate innumerable demons, but also, as we have seen, gods such as Indras, Candras, Rāmas and Kṛṣṇas, prophets such as Mahādīns (Muḥammads), not to speak of human beings, both powerful and humble ones. He only saves those who take refuge in Him.

In this respect, a last point ought to be made regarding the theological change manifested in the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*: it regards precisely the conceptions of sin and salvation. For the Sikhs of the time of the nine first Gurūs, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when nascent Sikhism was essentially a path of salvation, all sins were considered as rooted in one's own ego and its evil impulses and desires, and they could only be expiated by meditating on God and seeking union with him.

In order to appreciate the evolution which takes place with Gurū Gobind, we have to go back first to the period following the end of the first war and then to the last part of the third war mentioned in the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*.[liv]A statement of the Gurū, when he settles in Anandpur after his victory in the battle of Bhaṅgāṇī, makes it clear that now, readiness to take part in the *dharma-yuddha* is a virtue expected from those seeking the Gurū's protection *(pratipāra)*:

> *judha jīta āe jabai ṭikai na tina pura pāva*
> *kāhalūra maiṃ bāṃdhiyo āna anandpur gāva*
> *je je nara tahaṃ na bhire dīne nagara nikāra*
> *je tiha ṭhaüra bhale bhire tinai karī pratipāra*[lv]
> When we returned after having won the war, I did not remain in this town (of Pāoṇṭā);
> In the territory of Kalhūr, I consolidated the village of Anandpur.[lvi]
> The men who had not fought there, were driven out.
> Those who had fought bravely in that place, I protected them.

It is to be noted that the tone adopted here is that of a king, who has the political power to change the face of his city, to decide who is permitted to inhabit it and who is not. The Gurū-King, who extends his protection to the Sants, affirms his royal authority through his

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administration of justice in the name of his own code, claiming to have the evil-doers put to death:

bahuta divasa iha bhāṃti bitāe
santa ubāra duśata sabha ghāe
ṭāṃga tāṃga kari hane nidāna
kūkara jimi tina taje parānā[lvii]
Many days were spent in this way.
The Sants were given charity; the evil persons were all killed:
They finally died on the gallows,
They breathed their last like dogs.

Just as valour is valued as virtue, cowardice is condemned as a sin, as clearly evidenced in the final episode of the third war narrated in the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*. After all the attempts of Dilāvar Khān to crush Gobind and his Sikhs have failed, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb decides to send one of his sons to the Punjab. Several Sikhs, frightened, leave Anandpur for safer villages, without permission from the Gurū:

kitaka loka taji saṅgi sidhāre
jāi base giravara jahha bhāre
cita mūzīyana ko adhika ḍarānā
tinai ubāra na apanā jānā[lviii]
Some people left my company;
They went to live in the hills, they sought a place there.
These fools were much frightened;
They did not know that their safety was with me.

But as if by divine punishment, the Mughal Prince's officers chased and caught them, shaved their heads and urinated on them, struck their foreheads with shoes and bricks, walked them in the villages with a bag of horse excrement tied on their faces, and plundered and destroyed their houses. The Gurū comments:

gura paga te je bimukha sidhāre
īhāṃ ūhāṃ tina ke mukha kāre [lix]

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Those who turn their face away from the feet of the Gurū,
In this world and the next, their face is blackened.

In contrast, all the people who are known to be disciples of the Gurū are spared, and they are protected from sin and pain:

je je gura caranana ratta hvai haiṃ
tina ko kaśaṭi na dekhana pai haiṃ
riddha siddha tina ke griha māhīṃ
pāpa tāpa chvai sakai na chāhīṃ [lx]
Those who are in love with the Gurū's feet,
They never see suffering.
Prosperity and success abide in their homes,
Sin and pain cannot touch them.

With these episodes, we see a major change in the Sikh conceptions of God and of virtue and sin. It is now a religious duty for a Sikh to stay by his Gurū, to fight with him for the establishment of the just order of dharma, and as a consequence, cowardice and dissimulating one's own Sikh identity become major sins, punished by God both in this and the next world.[lxi]

Thus, the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* stands out as a unique poem, with its three sections forming a coherent and grandiose whole: the Sant who praises God in a renewed way in the first section explains in the second section that, as heir to both a dynasty of kings and a lineage of Gurūs, he has been sent into the world by God to restore dharma; this is what he shows himself doing in the three *dharma-yuddha*s narrated in the third section[lxii]. This intense and complex poem unites opposites and overcomes contradictions.[lxiii] God is both Kāla and all the forms He may take ; Gobind is both God's deputy in charge of restoring dharma, Gurū Nānak's reincarnation and a Kṣatriya of the Solar Dynasty valuing his caste and his sub-caste. In this way, the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* epitomises the *Dasam Granth*, of which it is a kind of digest. In this book, hymns typical of *nirguṇī bhakti* border with praises for the Devī and her sword and with long narrative poems dedicated to the high deeds of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the volume condensing in a significant whole Sikhism and the Hinduism of the hills which had become the socio-religious environment of Gurū Gobind and his Sikhs. The digest of a digest, the

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Bacitra Nāṭak projects a densely charged image of Gurū Gobind, as a Sant, as a King with a prestigious genealogy and affirming his political and judicial power in his capital of Anandpur, as the heir to the lineage of the Sikh Gurūs, as an envoy of God engaged in *dharma-yuddha* and renewing the Sikh conception of God, virtue and sin. By combining his spiritual and temporal energy as Sant and Sipāhī, Gurū Gobind was going to manifest this authority in a magnificent way by creating the Khālsā a few months after the composition of the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*. As for the energy condensed in his autobiographical poem, it formed the matrix of two major eighteenth century Sikh literary genres: the *Rahit-nāmā*s or 'Code manuals' detailing the code supposedly revealed by the Gurū when he created the Khālsā, and the *Gur-bilās* or 'Pleasure of the Gurū' concentrating on the deeds of military valour he accomplished[lxiv].

Notes and References:

[i] See among others, Ziegler, Norman P. 'Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties During the Mughal Period', in *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, edited by John F. Richards, pp.215-51. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1978, and Ramusack, Barbara N. *Indian Princes and Their States*, pp.12-47 (chap. II « Princely States Prior to 1800 »). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[ii] On the Braj country, see Entwistle, Alan W. *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage,* Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1987. For a recent synthesis on one of the Kṛṣṇaite sects established in Brindavan (the Nimbarka sampradāya), see Clémentin-Ojha, Catherine. 'sampradāya' in *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. III, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar and Vasudha Narayan, pp.429-443. Leiden: Brill, 2011. For a quick overview of Braj literature, see Snell, Rupert. *The Hindi Classical Tradition: A Braj-Bhāṣā Reader*, pp.29-60 (Introduction, chapter III 'Braj Bhāṣā Literature'). London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991.

[iii] For an overview, see Cleveland Beach, Milo. *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

[iv] For a remarkable *vaṃśavalī* study, see Thapar, Romila. 'The vamshavali from Chamba: Reflections on a Historical Tradition', *Himāl South Asian* (March, 2010). Accessed January 15, 2013. http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/87.html.

[v] The literary aspects of Rajput culture, particularly in Rajasthan, have recently been dealt with in an illuminating study in Bush, Allison. *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Regarding the *Dasam Granth*, Robin Rinehart has remarkably

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located it in the context of the North Indian courtly and literary practices of its time. See Rinehart, Robin. *Debating the Dasam Granth*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[vi] For an overview of the history of the Sikhs, see Grewal, J.S. *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, and for an overview of the history of their religion, see McLeod, W.H. *Sikhism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997.

[vii] Rinehart, *Debating the Dasam Granth*, pp.50-68. Rinehart precisely notices that the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* has a lot 'in common with traditional Indian genres of panegyrics of royal families and spiritual leaders' (p. 67). See also, notably, Deol, Jeevan. 'Eighteenth Century Khalsa Identity: Discourse, Praxis and Narrative' in *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, edited by Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh and Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, pp.32-34. Richmond: Curzon, 2001, and Fenech, Louis E. *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus: The Court of God in the World of Men*, pp.148-153. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008, and Murphy, Anne. 'An Idea of Religion: Identity, Difference and Comparison in the *Gurbilās*' in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice*, edited by Anshu Malhotra and Farida Mir, pp.102-103. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. and Dhavan, Purnima. *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799*, pp.23-26 and 32-40. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

[viii] For a comprehensive and in depth study of the book and of the problems it addresses, see Robin Rinehart, *Debating the Dasam Granth*.

[ix] *Srī Dasama Gurū Grantha Sāhiba Jī*, 2 vols. pp. 809-1388. Amritsar: Bhāī Catar Siṅgh Jīvan Siṅgh, 1979.

[x] See bibliography under *Dasam Granth*.

[xi] Among the other hymns, those that figure prominently are addressed to God and a defiant letter in Persian to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, the *Zafara-nāmā* (Pers. *ẕafar-nâme* 'letter of victory') written in the *mutaqarīb* meter of Ferdowsi's *Śâhnâme*. See *Dasam Granth*, pp. 1389-1394; for an accurate and beautiful English translation with an introduction and notes, see Shackle, Christopher and Singh Mandair, Arvind-pal trans., *The Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from the Sikh Scriptures*, pp.137-144. London: Routledge, 2005.

[xii] On the debate on the authorship of the *Bacitra Nāṭaka*, see Rinehart, Robin. 'Strategies for Interpreting the *Dasam Granth*,' in *Sikhism and History*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Gerald Barrier, pp.135-150. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, and Rinehart, Robin. *Debating the Dasam Granth*, and Deol, 'Eighteenth Century Khalsa Identity', pp. 32-33.

[xiii] In 1665, his father Gurū Tegh Bahādur had moved his centre from Kiratpur to a safer abode, 'a piece of land covering the ruined mound of an older village, Mākhovāl, which the Gurū had earlier purchased for this purpose from the Rājpūt hill state of Kahlū'. See Siṅgh, Gurmukh. 'Anandpur' in *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, edited by Harbans Singh, 4 vols., Patiala: Punjabi University, 1992-1998, (*s. v.* 'Anandpur', accessed January 15, 2013,http://www.advancedcentrepunjabi.org/eos/),and which

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he renamed Cakk Nānakī after the name of his mother . See also Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Pp. 69-70). As we shall see at the end of this section of the article, the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* was indeed not composed during the time the Gurū spent in Pāoṇṭā, the town which he had founded on the bank of the Yamuna in what is today the Sirmūr district of Himachal Pradesh, on a land offered to him by Rājā Medinī Prakāsh of Nāhan, and where, according to the Sikh tradition, he and the fifty-two poets he patronised at his court composed the bulk of what was to become the *Dasam Granth* (see, for instance, Gaṇḍā Siṅgh "Gobind Siṅgh, Gurū," in *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, edited by Harbans Singh, 4 vols. (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1992-1998), *s.v.* "Gobind Siṅgh, Gurū," accessed January 15, 2013,http://www.advancedcentrepunjabi.org/eos/.

[xiv] On the Sants, the reference work is Schomer, Karine. and McLeod, W. H. eds., *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987.

[xv] See McLeod, W.H. *The Evolution of the Sikh Community,* 1-19. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975, and Alam, Muzaffar. *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India. Awadh and the Punjab: 1707-1748*, pp. 139-145. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986, and Singh, Chetan. *Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century*, p.144 and *passim.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

[xvi] *Dohrā, tribhaṅgī chanda, bhujaṅga prayāta chanda, rasāvala chanda, narāja chanda, toṭaka chanda, savaiyā, caupaī, chapai chanda, aṛila, bhujaṅga chanda, madhubāra chanda, pādharṛī chanda* and *cāraṇī dohrā*.

[xvii] van Buitenen, J.A.B. 'On the Archaism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*' in *Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes*, edited by Singer, Milton. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1966. In this illuminating article, J.A.B. van Buitenen has studied a somewhat parallel case, showing that Vedic forms encountered in the Sanskrit of the *Bhāgavata Purrāṇa* written in South India around the tenth century not only seek to account for the archaism of the text, but are also meant to affirm its orthodoxy in the Vedic tradition.

[xviii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 1.6, *Dasam Granth*, p. 39. In these references, the first number is that of the section and the following one(s), if any, that or those of the section(s).

[xix] See above, note 13, and *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 8.36 (*Dasam Granth*, p. 62), quoted in the third section of this article.

[xx] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 6.42-43, *Dasam Granth*, pp. 57-58.

[xxi] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 8, *Dasam Granth*, pp. 60-62.

[xxii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 9, Dasam *Granth*, pp. 62-64.

[xxiii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 10, *Dasam Granth*, pp. 64-65.

[xxiv] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 11, *Dasam Granth*, pp. 65-70.

[xxv] For details from other Sikh sources on these events, see Harbans, Singh, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, *s.v*. "Bhaṅgānī", "Nadauṇ", "Dilāwar Khān" and "Jujhār Siṅgh Hāḍā". The later part of this war will be dealt with in the third part of this article.

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[xxvi]*Bacitra Nāṭaka* 8.29-30, *Dasam Granth,* p. 62.

[xxvii]*Bacitra Nāṭaka* 9.19, *Dasam Granth,* p. 64.

[xxviii]*Bacitra Nāṭaka* 10.9, *Dasam Granth,* p. 65.

[xxix] For a recent study of the *Zafara nāmā*, with an emphasis on the Islamic background of the Sikh tradition, see Fenech, Louis E. 'The History of the Ẓafar-nāmah of Guru Gobind Singh' in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice*, edited by Anshu Malhotra and Farida Mir, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012.

[xxx]*Zafara-nāmā* 22, *Dasam Granth,* p. 1390. The text is given here in standard transliteration from Persian.

[xxxi]*Bacitra Nāṭaka* 6.29, *Dasam Granth,* p. 57.

[xxxii] In his masterly study of *The darbar of the Sikh Gurus*, Louis Fennec associates the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* with what he calls 'the predominant genre in the *Dasam Granth*', namely the *caritra*, an old 'expressive' style of Indic narrative and/or inscriptional discourse, a format much like the Sanskrit *mahākāvya*, used to narrate biographies of kings and their kingly deeds" (Fenech, *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus*, p.150).

[xxxiii] 'Mahapuruṣa was a title used by naked ascetics (naga), both Saiva and Vaisnava, in the service of Indian Princes', (Sarkar, Jadunath. *A History of Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp. 263, 266–267. Allahabad: Mahanirvani, P.A. 1959); « A great man; but applied especially to religious ascetics, especially to those that pretend and are believed to have overcome physical infirmities, to be able to live without food, and to be impassive to external or elemental influences » (Wilson, H.H. *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms and of Useful Words Occurring in Official Documents relating to the Administration of the Government of British India.* London, p.318. Wm. H. Allen &Co., 1855, repr. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, n. d.

[xxxiv]*Bacitra Nāṭaka* 6.30, *Dasam Granth,* p.57.

[xxxv]*Bacitra Nāṭaka* 6.31-33, *Dasam Granth,* p.57.

[xxxvi]Let us in passing remark that implicitly Gurū Gobind makes his own the popular etymology of the name of his caste, the Khatrīs, which is that of all the Sikh Gurūs: whereas the Khatrīs are indeed one of the most important trading caste of the Panjab, Gurū Gobind derives Khatrī from the Sanskrit *kṣatriya* (on the Khatrīs, see Rose, H. A., *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Puṇjab and the North-West Frontier Province*, 3 vols. [Vol. 1 Lahore: Superintendent, Govt. Printing, Punjab, 1919 ; vols. 2 et 3 Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1911-1914], vol. II, 501-526). This origin myth occupies the sections 2 to 5 of the *Bacitra Nātaka* (*Dasam Granth*, pp. 47-54).

[xxxvii] Here is the list of the ten Sikh Gurūs with their dates, the date of passing of one being the date of accession to guruship of the next: Gurū Nānak (1469-1539), Gurū Angad (1504-1552, disciple of Gurū Nānak) and Gurū Amar Dās (1479-1574, disciple of Gurū Aṅgad), Gurū Rām Dās (1534-1581, son-in-law of Gurū Amar Dās), Gurū Arjan (1563-1606, son of Gurū Rām Dās), Gurū Har Gobind (1595-

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1644, son of Gurū Arjan), Gurū Har Rāi (1630-1661, son of Gurū Hargobind), Gurū Har Krishan (1656-1664, son of Gurū Har Rāi), Gurū Tegh Bahādur (1621-1675, son of Gurū Hargobind) and Gurū Gobind (1666-1708, son of Gurū Tegh Bahādur).

[xxxviii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 4.8, *Dasam Granth,* p. 53.

[xxxix] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 4.7, *Dasam Granth,* p. 53.

[xl] See above, note 33.

[xli] On all this, see McLeod's outstanding exegesis of Gurū Nānak's writings in his *Gurū Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. 2nd ed., Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976 [first ed. 1968].

[xlii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 6.59-60, *Dasam Granth,* p.59.

[xliii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 1.27-30, *Dasam Granth,* p.41.

[xliv] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 1.49, *Dasam Granth,* p.42.

[xlv] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 1.43-44, *Dasam Granth,* p.42.

[xlvi] Dhavan, *Debating the Dasam Granth*, p.35.

[xlvii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 1.60, *Dasam Granth,* p.43.

[xlviii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 1.50-52, *Dasam Granth,* p.42.

[xlix] *Dasam Granth*, pp. 74-119.

[l] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 14.11, *Dasam Granth,* p.73.

[li] Caṇḍī (fierce) is a name given to the form Devī takes to destroy the buffalo-demon Mahiṣāsura.

[lii] *Dasam Granth,* pp. 119-127. Robin Rinehart shows that these 'tales of the Goddess' pursue, in a different garb, the theme of leadership so dominant in the *Bacitra Nāṭaka* (Rinehart, *Debating the Dasam Granth*, pp.69-112).

[liii] *Dasam Granth,* pp.717-808.

[liv] I am hereafter repeating what I wrote in a comprehensive study on sin and expiation in Sikh texts and contexts (Matringe, Denis. 'Sin and expiation in Sikh texts and contexts: from the Nānak Panth to the Khālsā' in *Sins and Sinners*, edited by Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, Leiden and London: Brill, 2012).

[lv] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 8.36-37, *Dasam Granth,* p.62.

[lvi] Chakk Nānakī (see note 13) was renamed Anandpur by Gobind, who fortified it.

[lvii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 8.38, *Dasam Granth,* p. 62.

[lviii] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 13.2-3, *Dasam Granth,* p.71.

[lix] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 13.7, *Dasam Granth,* p. 71.

[lx] *Bacitra Nāṭaka* 13.14, *Dasam Granth,* p. 71.

[lxi] As I have shown (Matringe, 'Sin and Expiation'), later Sikh texts demonstrate that deserting the battlefield could be expiated only by readiness for martyrdom (on which theme see Fenech, Louis E. *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition. Playing the Game of Love?,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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[lxii] Rinehart, Robin *Debating the Dasam Granth*, 16, shows that in fact it is the whole *Dasam Granth* which weaves together the two themes of 'spiritual and temporal leadership' and of 'maintenance of proper order or dharma.'

[lxiii] On the place of the *Bacitra Nāṭak* among early narratives of Gurū Gobind, and the way these contractions are dealt with in first major *Gurbilās* (eighteenth century texts glorifying Gurū Gobind and the Khālsā), see Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became hawks*, pp. 32-44.

[lxiv] On the code manuals, see McLeod, W.H. *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama,* Dunedin: The University of Otago, 1987 and McLeod, W.H. *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, and on the *Gurbilās*, see Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature,* Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1988 and Anne Murphy, 'An Idea of Religion'.

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